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ABSTRACT

Fifty years of Soviet occupation in Estonia has damaged social and economic life. One issue for further development of Estonian society is the need to reform teacher education programs. This paper outlines some of the main problems concerning the content of theoretical preparation of future teachers in educational subjects at Tartu University (Estonia) and offers some solutions for improving the present situation. The document begins with a description of the teaching of educational theory during the 1920s and 1930s when the country's status was independent. There follows a description of changes the system underwent after 1940 when Estonia became part of the Soviet Union. An example of the theoretical content inherited from the Soviet past is presented in the table of contents of a 1974 pedagogy textbook. Though the text includes foreign educational and psychological ideas, the theoretical qualities peculiar to the Soviet system of teacher training are far more persistent. Today, with independence restored, Tartu University is looking to western countries for help in renewing the teaching of pedagogics and is seeking textbooks in modern trends in educational and social psychology to be translated into the Estonian language. (LL)

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Some recent developments in Estonia

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UPDATING THE THEORETICAL CONTENT OF TEACHER PREPARATION PERTAINING TO EDUCATIONAL SUBJECTS

Some recent developments in Estonia

Edgar Krull

Krull, E. Updating the theoretical content of teacher preparation pertaining to educational subjects: Some recent developments in Estonia. *Reprints and Miniprints* (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 754, 1992.

This paper is based on a lecture given in a Swedish-Baltic seminar at the Malmö School of Education, October 7-11, 1991. The author starts with a description how the teaching of educational theory was organized at Tartu University in Estonia during the 20s and the 30s, when the country had an independent status. After that he describes the thorough change that the teaching system went through after 1940, when Estonia became a part of the Soviet Union. He gives an example through listing a table of contents of a textbook in pedagogics from 1974. Finally, he emphasizes how Tartu University now after the new independence looks for help from western countries to renew the teaching of pedagogics and looks for good textbooks in educational and social psychology to be translated into the Estonian language.

Keywords: Comparative education, educational theory, Estonia, pedagogics, Soviet pedagogy, teacher training.

Introduction

Fifty years of Soviet occupation in Estonia has seriously damaged all the spheres of our social and economical life. Many of these problems have been thoroughly exposed and discussed in periodicals and monographs. At the same time there are topics which, due to their specificity, do not draw as much public attention, but nevertheless, they have vital importance for the further development of the Estonian society. One of these topics is the actual state of things in teacher education* for compulsory and secondary schools. Although, on the one hand, the need for its reorganization and renovation is quite obvious, the present situation, on the other hand, is not yet sufficiently analysed, nor are there conclusive solutions elaborated for its modernization. This paper will outline some of the main problems concerning the content of theoretical preparation of future teachers in educational subjects at Tartu University. Also, some solutions for improving the present situation will be suggested, and some steps made for this purpose are described.

Establishing the present situation in teacher education at Tartu University

In 1940, Tartu University employed a modern curriculum for teacher education which had been developed since the foundation of our national university in 1919. In the main lines its organization and content, during our first period of independence, was very similar to those in the Nordic countries. The theoretical preparation in educational subjects was provided by the Department of Education in the Faculty of Philosophy. The educational subjects were taught on the lower, middle, and upper levels. Students graduating as teachers from Tartu University were required to study these subjects on the lower and middle levels as a minimum (Eesti ..., 1939). In order to be admitted into the Department of Education they had to pass examinations on logic, ethics, and general psychology (Eesti ..., 1939).

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* There is no exact settlement of what kind of activity teacher preparation is – training or education. In this paper, Dennis O'Keeffe's point of view is supported: "... the teacher is fundamentally an educator ... and ... an educator must be *educated*" (O'Keeffe, 1990, p 74). When dealing with teacher preparation for totalitarian purposes the term "training" is preferred.

The curriculum of the educational sciences in the lower and middle levels consisted mainly of history of education, educational psychology, and of the methods of education and instruction. The study of these subjects was based mainly on different foreign textbooks and monographs in English and German. In 1932, the first Estonian textbook on general educational theory by P. Põld (1932) was published.

In 1940, the teacher education system and the curriculum in Tartu University were violently substituted by the common Soviet system of teacher preparation. Almost all of the staff in the Department of Education were dismissed. In order to better understand the real disaster that these imposed changes meant to the theoretical content of our teacher education we must briefly turn to the developments which reigned in the Soviet Union during the twenties and thirties.

In the late twenties it became quite clear that the new world order established in 1917 had failed. There were no signs of superiority of this social system over democratic countries in any area, and the preliminary revolutionary euphoria started to decay very quickly. In order to conserve its power, the Communist Party authorities started to look for enemies everywhere. The system of public education was repeatedly accused of using incorrect educational ideas and methods in the school. Finally, on July 4, 1936, a resolution of the Central Committee of the Party was announced: "Regarding the pedological perversions in the system of commissariats of public education." In reality, this bill banned the free discussion of different approaches to education, and condemned the application of foreign theoretical and practical ideas in this area. Instead, the Party ordered the elaboration of a new educational theory strictly based on Marxist principles.

This theory was built in spite of its complete disaccordance with real life and school practice, and was imposed on all schools and teacher training institutions in the Soviet Union. The same stroke of fate caught Tartu University in 1940.

In the postwar period the ideological pressure on the educational system and teacher training programs became most vigorous. As a consequence, the role of applied psychology, which is the principal basis of the educational sciences in democratic countries, was consistently diminished in the content of teacher preparation. The previous courses on educational subjects were substituted by a so-called Soviet pedagogical science, and the leading Soviet educators started to underline the principal difference between psychology and pedagogy. The discrepancy between the

possibilities of applied psychology for the area of education and the official pedagogical theory reached its culmination by the beginning of the eighties.

The heritage we possess now

In order get an idea of the theoretical content in teacher preparation we are inheriting from the past, it would be reasonable to look at the table of contents of a textbook of pedagogy. For this purpose, *Pedagogy for Higher Educational Institutions* edited by Heino Liimets (1974), is a good example.

Liimets was an academician of the educational sciences, a man with a broad outlook who tried to include many foreign educational and psychological ideas in this book. Consequently his textbook was accused by the authorities of being ideologically deficient, and was not allowed to be published. Nevertheless the manuscript of this textbook became available to our Department of Education.

As there has not been a new textbook published for the general course of pedagogy, the structure of Liimets' book still provides the main guidelines for our present theoretical content of teacher preparation. Of course, the compulsory ideological slogans have been mainly removed by our teaching staff, but the theoretical qualities peculiar to the Soviet system of teacher training is far more persistent.

The table of contents of "Pedagogy for higher educational institutions", 1974, ed by H. Liimets.

I *General Issues of Pedagogics*

1. The subject and aims of pedagogics.
2. The methods of research in pedagogics.
3. The aims and objective of communist education.
4. The innate characteristics of pupils and the environment as a factor of development.
5. Man as the object and subject of education.
6. The teacher as an educational agent.
7. The system of public education.

II Theory and methods of (social) education

8. The principles of communist education. Principle of:
   - the communist orientation in the education
   - activity

- education in the collective
- the integration of educational influences
- mutual enrichment
- positive impact on the education (stressing of the positive).

9. The conditions of education (collective, family, group of pupils as the object and condition of education).
10. The general methods of education:
    - Methods of shaping convictions and views (recitation, clarification, and discussion).
    - Methods of switching pupils into practical activity (order, arrangement, demand, instruction, training and exercise).
    - Methods of stimulation and initiating student behavior.
11. The forms of social education:
    - Education within the learning process.
    - Education in young communist and pioneer organizations.
    - Education in out-of-class and out-of-school activity.
    - The work of the teacher as the class manager.
12. The methods of social education:
    - The formation of the communist world outlook.
    - Education of communist morality.
    - Education of habits of work.
    - Esthetical education.
    - Physical education.

III Didactics

13. The nature of the instructional process.
14. The content of the curriculum in the Soviet school.
15. The principles of teaching. Principle of:
    - scientific objectivity
    - systematic and consistent approach
    - linking theory and practice
    - consciousness
    - activity
    - the use of visual aids
    - learning within one's powers
    - firmness of knowledge
    - accounting for individual differences
    - mutual enrichment of pupils

16. Methods of instruction (methods of teacher activity, methods of pupil activity including programmed instruction and individualization of learning).
17. The control of pupil's knowledge, skills and proficiency.
18. The organizational forms of teaching.

In the light of such a superficial and ideologically biased theoretical content, it is not surprising that the gap between the theory which was required on the examinations, and the school practice has become dramatic. On the other hand it would be wrong to maintain that there was no serious educational research in Estonia in the postwar period. Many research projects were conducted but mainly in very narrow problem areas (so it was easier to avoid the ideological impositions), also there were many studies which tried to advance the ideas and elaborations which started to spread in the thirties, and whose applications were banned in the forties and fifties by the Soviet authorities.

Trying to correct the situation

Now, in the period of our regaining national independence and freedom, our teachers and educators are very eager to apply different modern trends in education, as for example Rudolf Steiner's ideas, in our schools. But what is lacking is the basic general knowledge in the educational sciences, and therefore we often appear to be the victims of emotions in following new foreign educational ideas without comprehension of their background. The loss of our traditions and the continuity in providing basic educational instruction imposed by the years of Soviet occupation can be considered as most disastrous, and we who are dealing with the educational problems in Estonia suffer consciously or unconsciously from the lack of this knowledge.

Many years of work will be required in order to catch up with the level of thought in educational sciences common to developed countries. One way, and maybe the simplest one, to do that is to educate some people who would then be able to apply contemporary foreign textbooks to our teacher preparation courses. These textbooks should cover the main research achievements in educational philosophy, psychology, and sociology whose applications have proved to be useful in teachers' every day work. The next step would be the writing of Estonian textbooks on these topics.

The orientation just described is evidently in contradiction with the

present trends of diminishing the role of educational theory in teacher preparation in many developed Western countries. These trends emphasize the need for better integration of theory and school practice (Graves, 1990). However, this contradiction is illusory because the situation in the Western countries and in Estonia is different. Western countries very often experience the oversaturation of different theoretical approaches available to future teachers, and are dealing with the problem of effectiveness of these theoretical approaches in teacher education. In Estonia we are only starting to learn about these different approaches in educational theory, as they were not available before. The discussion of their effectiveness, the integration with scool practice, and the relationship between the extents of theory and the practical preparation, will be the next step in modernizing our content and organization of teacher education.

In addition to the problems directly concerning the requalification of our staff of teacher educators, there are many other impediments on the way to the new theoretical content of the teacher education program:

(1) Our present financial condition does not allow us to have a satisfactory survey of the contemporary literature on teacher education in other countries.

(2) For the same reason we are not able to provide our professors and students with foreign educational literature and textbooks in sufficient quantities and varieties.

(3) The overall level of foreign language skills of our students and professors has decreased during the postwar period. Though there is a serious interest towards the learning of them now, the majority of our staff and students is not yet able to use textbooks in English, German or French.

The present financial condition and the meagre knowledge of foreign languages of our people lead us to the necessity of translating some foreign textbooks on education into Estonian as a temporary solution. This solution has at least two serious problems:

(1) The introduction of the translated foreign textbooks imposes alien cultural contexts to Estonian educational thought.

(2) In our very limited financial condition we have to be satisfied with the single translated textbook on a certain topic, which imposes a monopolized approach.

In addition, the introduction of these textbooks, translated or in original languages, will entail the necessity to learn to use them properly in the practical instruction of our teacher students. A good way for that would be

to see and learn how these books are used in their original countries. Unfortunately the opportunities to have a scholarship for the implementation of such a goal have been very limited or non-existent, up to now.

Finally, having overcome most of the problems concerning the arguments pro and contra the necessity of translation, a very important question remains to be answered: what is the most appropriate textbook to translate? At first glance there seems to be no problem, as common sense suggests to introduce a textbook covering the general course of education. Nevertheless, in reality it turned out on the contrary. The decision appeared to depend heavily on our readiness to accept the idea that the structure of our theoretical courses on education could not be made up-to-date by simply introducing some minor changes in them or their reorganization. There were many suggestions to translate into Estonian only some of the most important chapters from these textbooks in order to supplement our own courses. In conclusion, we decided to pursue the translation and publication rights of Gagné/Driscoll's "Essentials of Learning for Instruction" (1988). This solution was a compromise, as the idea that only a part of the course of education – learning and instruction theory – needed to be substituted was more acceptable, and the integrity of the new textbook would be retained.

A year later it became more and more apparent that this textbook was too specialized, and we reached a common understanding that a new general course on education would be needed.

After studying the main qualities of many different textbooks, and learning the possibilities of acquiring the permission for their publication in Estonia, we found the Lindgren/Suter's "Educational Psychology in the Classroom" (1985) to be the best choice.

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